

Town of *Dunstable* Selectboard
Meeting Minutes
April 26, 2022
Town Hall, Dunstable, MA 01827

Convened: 6:00 pm

Present: Leah D. Basbanes, chair, Kieran D. Meehan, vice chair, Ronald J. Mikol, member(s); David DeManche, Interim Town Administrator; James W. Dow, Chief of Police; Erik Hoar, Sgt. of Police; Phil DeNyse, Parks Commission; Mike Martin, Roads Commission; Joan Simmons, Planning Board; Patrick Kerrigan, Fire Captain; Rafel Cabanas, Firefighter

Call to Order & Public Forum

Ms. Basbanes called the meeting to order. She then went over the agenda which included consideration of a Board of Health Request for Placement of Donation Bins for Clothing, Textiles, & Shows at 160 Pleasant Street, Discussion About a Screening Committee & Job Advertisement for Hiring of Permanent Fire Chief, Discussion & Determination on Changes to Proposed FY23 Budget Regarding the Staffing Needs of Town Hall, and a Determination on Prioritization of Interim Town Administrator Tasks Based on Former Town Administrator Recommendations.

- Mr. DeNyse asked the Board about the Annual Town Meeting at Larter Field. Specifically if there is anything that the Board needs. Mr. DeManche noted the sound system is lined up, the Police Dept.'s generator will be utilized for power, and the only thing they really need is a bathroom option. Mr. DeNyse responded that Parks & Recreation have jointly seen to that and there will be facilities. The Board then asked about things like a police detail and chairs. Mr. DeManche responded that he's still hunting down chairs. Chief Dow noted that the detail is also in the works. Mr. DeManche also reported he's talked to Mr. Callahan, who usually helps with counters, and we have some already lined up. He has also spoken with the Town Moderator about the setup as well.
- Mr. Martin reminded the Board about the BSC Group and the cost for that engineering. He's asked the Board about this matter in the past. The funds were to be paid for from the ARPA money. He asked if he should sign the paperwork or whether the Interim Town Administrator or Board chair should. Mr. Martin answered a few questions and provided some details on the work. Given some market forces the prices are in a little flux, but hopefully what we expected will remain in our benefit. There was a clarification as to the whole scope. Mr. Martin outlined what the design would look to and how it would work. We might be able to get to Lowell Street, but it could come at sacrificing the loop plan that would loop Hillcrest Street back down Westford Street to Main Street. The total cost of this design should be at \$20,000. He confirmed he had a firm quote. The Board also felt it safe for Mr. DeManche to sign the paperwork under his official capacity.

Board of Health Request for Placement of Donation Bins for Clothing, Textiles, & Shoes at 160 Pleasant St.

The Board noted this lot used to have the Temporary Town Hall on it and sits across from the Post Office. The Board had some concerns, but was not opposed. The concern was how frequent the bins would be emptied. The Board recalled that the bins out by McLoon Farm attracted items not concerned with the bins. And it often took a long time to get those items removed. Mr. Voelker interjected to say that the commitment was to remove such items within 2 business days. The Board understood that but also recalled that there are other options in town. Chief Dow reminded that a lot of these companies actually are for profits. The Board concurred and expressed concern about what the bins can attract. In the past these were at the Transfer Station and only open to the public when the Station was. This resulted in better oversight. Additionally 160 Pleasant Street is very public and high visibility. It was agreed to invite the Board of Health to send a person to the Board's next meeting to discuss this further including the reasons for selecting this particular town property as the proposed location. The Board also recalled a few other bins in town such as one behind the church. There are certainly some of these bins in town.

Discussion about Screening Committee & Job Ad for Hiring of Permanent Fire Chief

The Board asked Captain Kerrigan if the firefighters were amendable to what was previously discussed about some participating with the Screening Committee. Captain Kerrigan responded affirmatively that they were. Discussion then shifted to credentials for a Fire Chief and other pieces of what will go into this including the job ad. A few suggestions were made as to changes. It was agreed to include publication of the job ad in the *Lowell Sun*. The Board was less enthusiastic about the idea of placing it in *The Groton Herald*. *The Herald* has wide distribution locally in Groton and Dunstable, but not necessarily in the broader region and state. Some contrasts were made between the job description and the job ad. Captain Kerrigan explained that while some things can be included in the job ad as the job description,

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not everything would be. It was agreed to add a few of the requirements relating to physical capability into the ad. Discussion concluded with all parties agreeing the ad should go out.

Discussion & Determination on Changes to Proposed FY23 Budget Regarding the Staffing Needs of Town Hall

Mr. DeManche reported he's consulted with the Treasurer/Collector and the Town Clerk. The creation of a combination of those offices at this stage is too much. Mr. Palaia had built the proposed change into the budget, and he is proposing reversing it. He'd still leave the \$20,000 in consulting for Town Clerk in the budget. He's spoken to a number of Town Clerks and it may be hard to find an Interim or replacement Town Clerk given the looming election. So many Clerks are retiring this summer to avoid the 2022 midterm election. So he's restored the position of Assistant Town Administrator, the Treasurer/Collector, and Town Clerk as distinct offices. Essentially as FY22 with adjustments such as COLA's for FY23. Mr. DeManche then turned to the Fire Dept. and some differences he has in understanding as to that department's budget with the Advisory Board. He also reported on work by the Town Accountant. The Town Accountant is very worried about the towns over reliance on Free Cash to plug a deficit in the budget. She's been able to adjust the books and that has resulted in a small bump in the levy limit. She recommends essentially leaving that on the table in case the town has to come back and use that excess levy later. This brought up the need for a Proposition 2 ½ Override. The Board noted that one has been discussed and debated for several fiscal years. It had been expected we'd do one this year with the school district. But the district ended up not needing it. The Board expressed deep concern about next year's Free Cash level and if we could end up with so little so as to not be able to plug a deficit next year. This could cause an override to occur as result of crisis not planning. Mr. DeManche elaborated on ways that the Free Cash figure might be larger than we currently project it. Many towns do use Free Cash, but most towns try to not use all of it and to put some of it in stabilization.

The Board noted it has attempted to put some Free Cash into stabilization, but unfortunately the school district ended up needing more money that year and it didn't happen. The other concern is how much we've cut department budgets. To pay for various things, including staffing needs, the needs of the school district and the like, we've cut to a point where there is little we can cut further without reducing services. It is debatable if there is enough discretionary spending that can be frozen. The Board asked Mr. DeManche if there have been significant expenses above and over \$5,000. Mr. DeManche responded he hasn't seen anything like that. It was suggested that Department Heads could be consulted. Chief Dow interjected to remind that departments often already defer purchases. They buy what they absolutely need for most of the year then at the end of the year look to see what's left and to squeeze out extra's like a few more new tires for police cruisers, etc. He understood the concerns, but reminded that holding off until FY23 to spend on some items, to defer items, can result in robbing Peter to pay Paul. Truly, departments know the limits of their budgets. Still Chief Dow conceded that Department Heads need to manage well. The Board acknowledged that, but noted that as things stand we're going to be forced into an override. The Board wasn't of one mind that this was entirely negative. We've put off an override for years. We did after all begin discussion of one back in 2020 before the pandemic started. The voters can see how the town has tried to make do. Mr. DeManche agreed noting there are only so many sources of revenue. Dunstable isn't suddenly going to gain an industrial tax base.

The Board agreed noting other expectations have fallen flat too. We'd had hope of a hydroponic lettuce company but the pandemic killed that plan. The marijuana businesses haven't materialized. So it is true that we aren't suddenly going to gain diversification of revenue streams. It was agreed that the town will need to plan for the future more than just budgets but also for staffing and succession. There was a question regarding the Fire Dept. from Mr. Cabanas. It was related to a figure in the budget. Mr. DeManche outlined that question noting it related to the Advisory Board concern he spoke of at the start of discussion. The Board had the same understanding as Mr. DeManche as opposed to Advisory Board's. Advisory interpreted this line as an increase in *per diem* hours. The Board and Mr. DeManche had understood that as more flexible and that the new permanent Fire Chief would be able to decide to use it for hiring two full timers. It was agreed that the amount will be in the salary budget no matter what. So it may not truly matter. Mr. DeManche noted that the Town Accountant would prefer to see that line funded the way the extra police officer was for FY22. That being an override. The Board noted that an override for next year could do that and address other issues. The Board asked Sgt. Hoar about a line in the Police Dept. budget relating to a resource officer. Chief Dow assisted in answering this question noting this line pays for dispatch and that officer and that cost was expected to go up. The Board was concerned about a gap between what was requested by the department and what Advisory allocated in the FY23 budget. It should be ensured that we have the funds to cover our commitments. The Board then went over a few other items, some relating to police, some relating to Tree Warden. The Board directed Mr. DeManche to convey to Department Heads the need to control spending in the next few months. Discussion concluded with agreeing to Mr. DeManche's changes.

Determination on Prioritization of ITA Tasks Based on Former TA Recommendations

Mr. DeManche briefly went over the items and asked the Board if it had any priorities. The Board felt confident that Mr. DeManche could determine the priorities himself. It was felt there wasn't any need to go too deeply into it at this stage.

Appointments & Resignations

The Board noted there are no appointments to make at this meeting or resignations to accept. That said, the Annual Appointments season will begin shortly. Mr. Voelker briefly reported that he has begun the process of reaching out to appointees regarding their expiring status and any interest in re-appointment.

Interim Town Administrators Report

Mr. DeManche reported on several items. There's a filing that needs to be done for ARPA. We have a consultant for helping us with ARPA reporting. The cost should be pretty minimal. He then turned to the Affordable Housing Project. They held a pre-bid meeting and had two different potential bidders attended. He also reported on a housing production plan that needs to be done. It appears NMCOG would assist us. The Board noted that NMCOG has a staffing problem as they lost their director to retirement and lost another key person. They still haven't replaced the director. Mr. DeManche then reported on his meeting with the Town Moderator. They're coordinating the motions and the different types of majorities needed for different types of votes as well as plans for chairs, restrooms, and a tent for the sound system. We'll likely eschew a PowerPoint since the sunlight might be too intense to see a projector screen. Mr. DeManche then discussed, along with Mr. DeNyse, the plans for the tennis courts. Mr. DeNyse noted that one of the things Parks is working on is making sure that Conservation Commission is okay with the plans. The Board responded that this can be readily addressed. It should be a simple form. Then Conservation has a public meeting and reviews it. Mr. DeNyse understood that, but expressed the desire to ensure everything is done correctly.

Mr. DeManche agreed to continue working with Mr. DeNyse on this important topic. Mr. DeManche then reported on discussion he's held with Mary Judge Pigsley at DEP regarding the PFAS problem at Groton-Dunstable Regional High School. They believe that a prior fire there resulted in some contamination in groundwater due likely to fire suppressants used at the time. This means about 9 houses in Dunstable may have contaminated wells. Sgt. Hoar interjected to note that it was a fire relating to the track field and occurred 15 years ago. They used a foam. Mr. DeManche then reported on DEP's desire for a joint meeting between the towns to discuss how to handle this problem. The Board agreed that such a meeting should be called. Mr. DeManche then briefly reported on talks with various Department Heads including the Highway Superintendent and the Chief of Police. The Rt. 113 Infrastructure Project is underway and we're publishing information as much as possible. The Board then asked about the plans for Memorial Day. Mr. DeNyse putting on a different hat, as an organizer of the parade, elaborated on the plans. Things are going along well and he felt confident that the parade will go off without a hitch despite the project. We'll also have some special guests this year. This year should look more like pre-pandemic days. The Board was happy to hear the news. Sgt. Hoar noted that the road won't be worked on during Memorial Day so it shouldn't pose any hindrance. The Board agreed to put some of this information as well as other updates in its next *What's Happening in Dunstable?* newsletter.

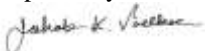
Minutes

The Board reviewed the minutes for April 11th and April 12th. The Board seeing no reason not to approve the minutes determined to do so and approved them as written.

A motion was made by Mr. Mikol to approve the minutes of April 11th & 12th, 2022 as written. The motion was seconded by Mr. Meehan and passed without objection.

A motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Meehan at 7:02 pm. The motion was seconded by Mr. Mikol and passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted by



Jakob K. Voelker, Assistant Town Administrator

Approved and adopted on 5/10/22